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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

ORLANDO B. DOUGLAS, M.D.,

PRESIDENT

OF THE

MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE COUNTY OF NEW YORK.

NOVEMBER 24TH, 1890.





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Members of the Society, Ladies and Gentlemen :

A custom, honored with age, calls for an address from him whom you elect to serve as President, on the occasion of his beginning his service. It is always wise to consider carefully the work we are about to undertake, count the cost, and reckon the probable profits and losses. We may study the original designs, take measurements, inspect the work, and possibly draw anew some detail of the plans so ably prepared by the founders of this Society.

Our lives, like our books, are punctuated. We pause at minor points, and here, at our anniversary meeting, come to a full stop before commencing a new period, perhaps to turn a new leaf. The able administration of my predecessor renders the latter difficult. But I am persuaded that the highest compliment we can pay him and those who preceded him is to build on the foundations which they have laid.

To believe that the greatest possible attainment has been reached is to clip the wings of aspiration; to be hopeless of advancing is to chain the wheels of progress; to do no better work than has been done is to entail on posterity the doom of death, for when we cease to grow we begin to decay.

To know whence and why our Society was called into being, let us go back to its founding. Eighty-four years ago on the first day of last July, one hundred and two physicians and surgeons of this city met in the front court room of the City Hall and organized the Medical Society of the County of New York. This was in compliance with *An Act to Incorporate Medical Societies for the purpose of regulating the practice of Physic and Surgery*, in the State.

This Society was conceived in 1788, its period of gestation being eighteen years, during which it was known as "The New York Medical Society." It owed its existence largely to army surgeons, who settled here after the Revolutionary war, this being the capital and metropolis of the country, and these men were identified with our Society.

New York City then covered one-twentieth of its present area, and contained a population of about 80,000. The entire State comprised less than half the number of people that now inhabit this city, according to the last federal census. There were 321—more or less regular—practitioners of medicine in the city, besides, as now, an army of quacks. Political animosities, social strife, personal jealousies prevailed, artifice and intrigue succeeded in advancing private interests and professional emoluments. Almost from the time of the first settlement of this city, in 1609—or, if we confine our research to the records, from the time of "the first doctor in whom the people had any confidence," Johannes La Montagne, a graduate and practitioner from Leyden, who settled here in 1636—there were ever present doctors of a baser sort. As early as 1652 a law was passed by the Dutch council to protect chirurgians of New Amsterdam in their asserted exclusive right to shave, and, while it is acknowledged that "shaving doth not appertain exclusively to chirurgery," it is declared to be "an appendix thereunto." By the same power ship-barbers were forbidden to dress wounds or give potions on shore without the knowledge and consent of the petitioners for this law, or of Dr. La Montagne. At various times subsequently—namely, in 1684, 1731, 1760, 1767, 1801, and 1803—laws were enacted attempting to regulate practitioners and the practice of medicine.

Notwithstanding these laws and labor to suppress quackery, it would not be suppressed. Writers of that time tell us that "vile quacks and pretenders were imported from the old country." "Scandalous interlopers abounded like locusts in Egypt." "The profession was under no kind of regulation, any man at his pleasure setting up for a physician." "The greater part were mere pretenders to a profession of which they were entirely ignorant."

The statute enacted April 4th, 1806, by the Legislature of this State, to incorporate medical societies, "may be consid-

ered," says Dr. Romaine, "as among the first real efforts made in this country to reduce medicine to a regular science and give to the medical profession an honorable station in the community." And this Society was one of the first medical institutions which was created by the laws of this State.* That it was needed is quite apparent; that it was carefully considered, well founded, and has been ably managed, its continuance and flourishing condition to-night fully attest.

To know the spirit of men who founded this institution we should read their words, glowing yet with the fire of their zeal, wise and true to-day as when uttered. Courageous and resolute, they conquered prejudice, crushed pretension, and brought out of chaos order and honor to our profession. "If you seek their monuments, look about you." Their names are upon our record; all honor to them!

Earnest men built the superstructure, and some of their names are prominent in the annals of their country. Compute, if you can, the good these men have done, the lives they prolonged, the suffering they saved, the evil they prevented. They raised the standing, fixed the status, in their profession; they winnowed out the chaff from the wheat; they pointed to a higher plane and led the way; they were an inspiration and encouragement to men of lofty purpose, but they were a terror to evil-doers. Their virtues are for our emulation; the work they commenced is for us to carry forward.

The first President of this Society was afterward first President of our State Medical Society. In his inaugural address to the State Society in February, 1809, Dr. Nicholas Romaine says: "The history of all learned professions proves that none of them become extensively useful or successful except under the immediate restraint of its own members"; and "where ignorance and prejudice abound, there empiricism is maintained; where the genial influence of science and human improvement prevails, quackery and every kind of imposition diminish." He states "that the science of medicine embraces the study and knowledge of nature and of those arts which are conducive to the subsistence, comfort, and convenience of man." He takes the broadest view, and urges medical men to investigate the

*About twenty other counties organized medical societies on the same day, July 1st, 1806

topography, geology, and mineralogy of their own section, as well as botany, chemistry, medical and natural history, and agriculture. "The commonwealth of science is of no party," he says; "it cherishes a spirit of universal benevolence and improvement, and favors a liberal intercourse among men." He urges us to "add to the stock of human knowledge."

Much might be quoted from their sayings to prove the excellent spirit, the wisdom and foresight of men who wove into the fabric of the County Medical Society the colors of their characters, the textures of their lives. But this Society, the progenitor of two colleges, THE PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS and THE UNIVERSITY MEDICAL COLLEGE, the father of THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE* and of numerous other lesser bodies in the medical world, hale and hearty at eighty-five years of age, need not labor to prove what we readily grant. My successor a thousand years hence will find good evidence, I trust, of a healthy childhood, a vigorous manhood, and a prosperous old age.

Following is a list of all Presidents of our Society, with date of election and terms of service:

	Elected.	Served.
1. Nicholas Romaine.....	1806.....	1 year.
2. Samuel L. Mitchell.....	1807 { and again } { in 1821 }	2 yrs.
3. James Tillary.....	1808.....	5 "
4. Wm. Moore.....	1813.....	1 "
5. John R. B. Rogers.....	1814.....	7 "
6. Gilbert Smith.....	1822.....	2 "
7. David Hossack.....	1824.....	1 "
8. John Onderdonk.....	1825.....	3 "
9. Thomas Cock.....	1828.....	1 "
10. Samuel W. Moore.....	1829.....	1 "
11. D. L. M. Peixotto.....	1830.....	3 "
12. John B. Beck.....	1833.....	2 "
13. David Rogers.....	1835.....	1 "
14. Francis U. Johnson.....	1836 { and again } { in 1838 }	3 "
15. James R. Manley.....	1837.....	1 "

* The claim that the County Society was instrumental in establishing these colleges rests in the fact that the men who organized those institutions were active men in this Society, and the plans were laid here that eventuated in such grand results.

	Elected.	Served.
16. Wm. W. Miner.....	1840.....	1 year.
17. Nicholas H. Dering.....	1841.....	1 "
18. John C. Cheesman.....	1842.....	1 "
19. Richard K. Hoffman.....	1843.....	1 "
20. Edward Delafield.....	1844.....	2 "
21. Isaac Wood.....	1846.....	1 "
22. J. Kearny Rogers.....	1847.....	1 "
23. Benjamin Drake.....	1848.....	2 "
24. Wm. Rockwell.....	1850.....	3 "
25. Galen Carter.....	1853.....	2 "
26. Benjamin Ogden.....	1855.....	1 "
27. John R. Van Kleeck.....	1856.....	2 "
28. Edward L. Beadle.....	1858.....	1 "
29. Oliver White.....	1859.....	1 "
30. Alfred Underhill.....	1860 { and again } { in 1862 }	3 "
31. Henry D. Bulkley.....	1861.....	1 "
32. Isaac E. Taylor.....	1864.....	1 "
33. Thos. C. Finnell.....	1865.....	1 "
34. Samuel T. Hubbard*.....	1866.....	1 "
35. Edmund R. Peaslee.....	1867.....	1 "
36. Geo. T. Elliot.....	1868.....	2 "
37. Abraham Jacobi*.....	1870.....	2 "
38. Ellsworth Eliot*.....	1872.....	2 "
39. Henry B. Sands.....	1874.....	2 "
40. John C. Peters*.....	1876.....	2 "
41. Freeman J. Bumstead.....	1878.....	1 "
42. A. E. M. Purdy*.....	1879.....	2 "
43. Fred. R. Sturgis*.....	1881.....	1 "
44. David Webster*.....	1882.....	1 "
45. S. Oakley Vander Poel.....	1883.....	1 "
46. Daniel Lewis*.....	1884.....	2 yrs.
47. Laurence Johnson*.....	1886.....	2 "
48. Alexander S. Hunter*.....	1888.....	2 "
49. Orlando B. Douglas*.....	1890.....	

I am honored with the forty-ninth place on the list. Only eleven of this number are living, the senior ex-President being Samuel T. Hubbard, a graduate from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1835. I invited him to be with us this even-

ing, and we are honored by the presence of one who has accomplished much for our profession and our Society. Through such as he we reach back and clasp hands with the founders of this institution; back to the patriots who fought and won for us independence and a glorious country. Looking at Dr. Hubbard, I am inclined to say of him—borrowing a thought from Dr. Holmes—that “to be seventy years young may be better than forty years old.”

One hundred and seven years ago to-night Sir Guy Carlton completed his arrangements for the evacuation of New York, and on the morrow General Washington, Governor Clinton, General Knox, and many others entered the city and took formal possession. It is fitting that we remember that stirring and important event.

Through struggles and conflicts, sometimes fierce and bitter, we have come into this present peace. Rest is sweet after labor; we may enjoy it, but must gather strength for new victories. Our ranks are filled, our forces armed; we are more than a thousand strong, and what power lies latent in a thousand earnest men! “No amount of error, no bitterness of prejudice, no vested interest in falsehood, can resist the determined conviction of a single soul,” says James Freeman Clark. “There is but one failure,” Canon Farrar believes, “and that is, not to be true to the best we know.” And Carlyle tells us that “our desires are the presentiments of our capabilities.”

What have we to do? Our By-Laws define “the objects of the Society to be to aid in regulating the practice of physic and surgery in this State, and to contribute to the diffusion of true science, particularly to the knowledge of the healing art.”

To aid in regulating the practice of medicine and surgery is not to dictate what medicines shall be given, or in what doses; whether bolus or pellet shall be prescribed or proscribed. Nor does it indicate which of the various methods shall be employed in doing a surgical operation, whether we shall or shall not go when sent for, with whom we shall consult or whose advice we shall seek. These things can safely be left to the good judgment of educated physicians. It is not to persecute the unfortunate man whose diploma may be accidentally defective. But it is to say what shall be the qualifications of men entrusted with the lives of our wives and children, our neigh-

bors and friends, and the stranger who may require skilled medical or surgical service. It is that all who practise these arts shall comply with wholesome laws made to prevent wrongdoing and to encourage right-doing. It is to suppress bad practice of whatever kind and by whomsoever maintained. We insist that the PHYSICIAN shall hold no false dogma nor practise in a narrower sphere than the whole, true science of medicine.

To regulate the practice of physic and surgery is our chartered right and duty. For ten years we have employed counsel and invoked the authority of courts to suppress the illegal practice of medicine. How much has been accomplished we may never know, for we learn but a paltry part of the good done when we simply count the hundreds of bolder law-breakers who have been compelled to stop. The wholesome fear of penalties makes men careful, and law, unless enforced, is of little use. We must carry forward this work with our full energy.

To contribute to the diffusion of true science, particularly to the knowledge of the healing art, is our traditional and habitual work. Opportunity is offered to our younger members for presenting their carefully prepared thoughts by a brief article read before the Society, and to discuss topics presented by others. Dr. Jacobi, on retiring from the presidency of this Society eighteen years ago, said: "The scientific domain of medical societies like ours is to foster and encourage scientific tendencies and ambition in the individual members. Keep them informed, give them opportunity to express their thoughts on scientific subjects, and by expressing them improve their power to think."

The diffusion of true science—this platform is broad and comprehensive. And are the triumphs of science less glorious than the triumphs of politics or war? Would you aspire to the glorious work of Bismarck or of Koch, of Wellington or of Harvey? Is not he who saves a hundred thousand lives greater than he who destroys them?

The world never appreciated true science more than now. And if there lie hidden in every inch of the human body mysteries that will require a lifetime to solve, we need not despair of the want of opportunity. Discoveries have not all been made.

Not science only, but the healing *art* is for our study. Men of science are not always the best physicians. To be scientific and not *sympathetic* is to use the cold scalpel without skill. Sympathy is to science what wisdom is to knowledge, or power is to fuel—the assimilated, practical outgrowth, the useful, working resultant, of latent and active energies, the essence or refined extract of crude material. It is the social, the professional, the chemical bond; it is that which binds together God's universe, "without which every man would be a distinct species to himself."

The character of this Society is the aggregation of individual character. Its accomplishments are but the accomplishments of its members. Our corporate capacity is only the capacity of our component parts. We are as strong merely as our weakest constituent. With us rests the honor, the usefulness, the perpetuity of this Society. I appeal to you individually to be present at its meetings, to participate in our deliberations, to honor by your every-day life this grand old Society, the largest of its kind in the country, powerful for good, capable, like all power, of evil. What the future has in store for us we shall know, for we shall have much to do with making it. Vigorous manhood requires vigorous exercise and wholesome food. This must be furnished.

For myself I ask your firm support, your wise suggestions, your kindly criticism—but this I expect; you pledged it with your ballots. Human weakness and human limitations constantly call to exercise the divine within us—charity. This, too, I ask. "I tread in the footsteps of illustrious men," and, appreciating the high honor you confer upon me, I thank you for this expression of your confidence. I shall endeavor to perform the arduous duty imposed upon me fearlessly, honestly, justly.





